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FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7708
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 4655
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1902
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1532
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3628
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1432
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2258
RUEHBAD/AMCONSUL PERTH 0528
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHHJJPI/USPACOM HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 000131

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DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, INR/EAP, DRL/AWH
NSC FOR EPHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/23/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [ID](#)

SUBJECT: IN LOCAL ELECTION, STAR POWER IS THE WINNING TICKET

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Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Voters in Tangerang district--a populous suburb of Jakarta--delivered a resounding electoral victory to the incumbent district chief on January 20. The incumbent's victory in Tangerang's first-ever direct elections was aided by his decision to enlist an Indonesian movie star as his running mate. As Indonesians grow more used to elections, they are becoming more attracted to the many uses of star power. END SUMMARY.

ELECTION IN THE 'BURBS

¶2. (SBU) A large Jakarta suburb has just held its first ever direct election. Incumbent Tangerang Regent (district chief) Ismet Iskandar and running mate Rano Karno registered a decisive electoral triumph over two competing tickets, accumulating over 56 percent of the vote in the process. (Note: Tangerang is located 15 miles west of Jakarta. A sprawling suburb, it contains over four million people.) Iskandar was backed by a powerful coalition of 15 parties, including Golkar, PDI-P and PPP (the three largest parties in Indonesia). This ticket easily dispatched Jazuli Juwaini and Airin Rachmi Diany, who received 36 percent of the vote (backed by PKS), and Usamah Hisyam and Habib Alwi, who received only four percent of the vote (backed by the Democratic Party and PAN).

ENLISTING STAR POWER

¶3. (C) The election was particularly interesting because of the involvement of Indonesian celebrities. Despite his incumbent status, most election observers felt Iskandar's election prospects were in peril prior to his decision to enlist the star power of well-known movie actor Rano Karno. Karno first rose to prominence in the 1970's with his film "Before the Children of Betawi," a movie about an important ethnic group in the Jakarta region. Karno's presence on the ticket not only added glamour and glitz to Iskandar's campaign, but apparently also energized Tangerang's formidable Betawi voting block. Betawis constitute well over half of the population in Tangerang, and by all accounts

Karno--though not a Betawi himself--was able to "deliver" the Betawi vote.

A CELEBRITY SHOOTOUT

¶4. (C) The election became a celebrity shootout of sorts. Though Karno had previously flirted with the prospect of running for public office, some observers derided Iskandar's use of Karno as an obvious attempt to exploit Karno's star power. Karno brought no obvious substantive expertise on municipal issues and appeared to be content to smile for the cameras and nod attentively during Iskander's (somewhat plodding) campaign speeches. Through his popularity, however, Karno successfully changed the dynamic of the election.

¶5. (C) Opposition candidate Jazuli Juwaini, for one, responded to Karno's presence in the race by enlisting noted socialite Airin Rachmi Diany as his running mate. However Diany, who--like Karno--attracts far more press coverage for her photogenic good looks than anything else, ultimately was unable to match Karno's star power. According to PKS legislator Zulkieflimansyah, Diany was "simply outgunned" in the celebrity shootout.

ELECTIONS AS ENTERTAINMENT

6 (C) With the election out of the way, Iskandar will now have to shift his focus away from celebrity politics and get down to the more mundane business of running Tangerang. As one voter explained to poloff: while he enjoyed Rano Karno's films, he really wanted to know if Karno would "fix the roads." More generally, the Tangerang election--which is only the latest of hundreds that have taken place in Indonesia in recent years--highlights the increasing inclination of Indonesians to look at elections, in part, as entertainment and thus a venue to involve personalities such

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as actors in politics.

HUME